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Testimony of
The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Submitted to the
Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee
March 1, 2016

Re: H.B. 5375, AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONNECTICUT WORKFORCE ADVANCEMENT GRANTS FOR EDUCATION AND WOMEN IN TRANSITION PROGRAMS

Senators Bartolomeo and Witkos and Representatives Willis and Betts, and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) in support of H.B. 5375, An Act Concerning the Connecticut Workforce Advancement Grants for Education and Women in Transition Programs.

Education is key to women's economic security and overall well-being. Adults with higher levels of education consistently earn more than those with lower levels and are less likely to live in poverty.ⁱ Connecticut ranks fifth in the nation for its share of women with a bachelor's degree or higherⁱⁱ, however, education level varies considerably geographically across Connecticut and across racial and ethnic groups. Women in Connecticut's urban core are approximately twice as likely (22.8 percent) as women in the urban periphery (10.8 percent) and rural Connecticut (11.8 percent) to have less than a high school diploma. Furthermore, while white and Asian American women in Connecticut have high levels of education, less than one in five black and Hispanic women holds a bachelor's degree or higher.ⁱⁱⁱ

It is no secret that higher levels of education result in higher earnings for women. In Connecticut, as in the nation as a whole, women with a bachelor's degree or higher earn nearly twice the amount that women with a high school diploma earn.^{iv}

While educational attainment does result in higher earnings, it is important to note that the wage gap between women and men's earnings is still present regardless of educational attainment. In fact, the median annual earnings for women in the state with a high school diploma or the equivalent are equal to those of men with less than a high school diploma. And, for Connecticut women with a bachelor's degree or higher, they earn 72.2% less than their male counterparts.^v These data indicate that women's access to better paying jobs in Connecticut and the nation overall depends more on educational qualifications than men's access to them does.

Furthermore, we know that women, particularly low income women with young children, face specific challenges and barriers to completion of higher education degree programs, which this program seeks to address. The PCSW supports programs that seek to provide additional resources to assist low-income working parents with college degree attainment and H.B. 5375 seeks to do just that.

Thank you for your consideration of this important policy.

ⁱ Gornick, Janet C. and Markus Jantti. "Women, Poverty, and Social Policy Regimes: A Cross-National Perspective." Report #B258. Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research. 2010.

ⁱⁱ Institute for Women's Policy Research. *The Status of Women in the States 2015*. September 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ Institute for Women's Policy Research and PCSW. *The Status of Women in Connecticut's Workforce*. 2014.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Ibid.